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Explaining rebel-state collaboration in insurgency: Keep your friends close but your enemies closer

Abstract:

Insurgencies are routinely conceptualised using a binary opposition between states and rebels. However, this neglects the complexity of their interaction, especially their collaboration. Although rebel-state collaboration is found throughout the history of insurgency, we lack a full explanation of why it occurs. This article endeavours to take the first step in developing a comprehensive theory by analysing rebel-state collaboration in two heuristic case studies: Afghanistan and Syria. Through process tracing, we find four mechanisms that can explain collaboration: 1) to prevent a costly military stalemate, 2) to gain or maintain legitimacy, 3) because external threats incentivise a mutually beneficial alliance, and 4) because both have to operate under the constraints of the pre-existing political economy. The relative weight of each varies, reflecting the fluid and contextual nature of wartime political orders. Contrasting with more popular explanations, we argue rebels and states are willing to collaborate even when the other benefits too, providing they believe their relative gains would be higher than their opponents, or the costs of competing would be too large. In providing a fuller explanation of rebel-state collaboration, we advocate a rethink about how to capture and analyse the complex and dynamic interactions between rebels and states.

Introduction

The Trump administration's decision to withdraw American troops from northeastern Syria in October 2019 shocked the international community. By abandoning the West's most important ally in their fight against IS - the majority-Kurdish Syrian Democratic Forces - the White House enabled a major Turkish offensive into Kurdish-held, northeast Syria. Turkish President Erdogan had felt threatened by the Kurds, who had profited from the turmoil of the Syrian conflict by establishing a *de facto* autonomous region, aiming to break away from the Assad regime. Quickly, the Turkish army took much of Kurdish-held territory, including major cities. Without American protection, the Kurds turned to a perhaps surprising partner in their search for protection: the Syrian regime. The rise of a mutual enemy drove state and rebels closer together. Many viewed the partnership as an abrupt change, but the Kurdish alignment with the regime was actually a continuation of previous collaboration with Assad. Indeed, the initial establishment of the semi-autonomous region in 2014 was enabled by the regime's withdrawal of Syrian troops, coordinated with the Kurds.

This is an example of 'rebel-state collaboration': A sustained and negotiated relationship between a state and a rebel group, in which their behaviour indicates that both parties acknowledge that considering the other's interests is mutually beneficial. This particular example shows that rebels and states collaborate when it best suits their political interests, given the available options. *Prima facie* this might seem self-evident. Nevertheless, it contrasts with many existing explanations of rebel and state behaviour in civil war and suggests an oppositional rebel-state binary is oversimplistic.¹ Civil war studies have greatly developed our understanding of complex dynamics between actors who together constitute 'wartime political orders'.² However, they have yet to offer a comprehensive and nuanced account of the mechanisms that drive rebel-state collaboration.³

This article breaks new ground by providing a more thorough explanation of rebel-state collaboration than previous research. Its contribution is mainly empirical and theoretical. Empirically, by conducting meticulous process tracing of two heuristic case studies – Afghanistan and Syria – it provides a more nuanced account of the rationales for collaboration in these conflicts than others to date. Theoretically, drawing on these cases, it identifies inductively four central mechanisms that can explain rebel-state collaboration. These generalisable statements are intended as a foundation for further comparative research and a first step towards a comprehensive theory of rebel-state collaboration.

First, rebels and states collaborate when both want to prevent a costly military stalemate. Second, they collaborate to gain or maintain legitimacy, domestically and/or internationally. Thirdly, they collaborate because they deem other enemies as worse and that a mutual alliance benefits both. Fourth, they collaborate because both must operate under the constraints of pre-existing political

economy structures. Within a given conflict, the mechanisms vary in relative importance over time and space, shaped by the agency of local and elite actors and structural constraints.

We begin by outlining the article’s rationale, research design and methodology. Next, we provide a detailed account of rebel-state collaboration in each heuristic case study. The discussion section then elaborates on the four causal mechanisms. We conclude by reflecting on the need to think in a more nuanced way about the oppositional binary between rebels and states. We then suggest clear paths for future research on rebel-state collaboration.

Explanations of Rebel-State Collaboration

The article adopts a micro-level perspective on insurgency dynamics, drawing heavily on the civil war literature on wartime political orders and rebel governance. Going beyond characterising civil war as a military competition between state and rebel, these studies acknowledge the political nature of civil war – of which rebel-state collaboration is a good example.⁴

A significant part of the literature focuses on the provision of governance as an important non-violent strategy for rebel groups to compete with states for legitimacy and gain control over the population.⁵ Consistent with the view that insurgency is fundamentally a political battle, a prevalent explanation for rebel governance is that civil war represents competitive state-building.⁶ Rebels compete with the state for the population’s consent to be ruled. These studies implicitly assume that control over a particular territory is a zero-sum game between the state’s and the rebel’s governance structures.⁷

Figure 1: Taken from Staniland (2012), p. 248

A Typology of Wartime Political Orders

<u>Distribution of Control</u>	<u>State-Insurgent Cooperation</u>		
	<i>Active</i>	<i>Passive</i>	<i>Non-existent</i>
<i>Segmented</i>	Shared Sovereignty	Spheres of Influence	Clashing Monopolies
<i>Fragmented</i>	Collusion	Tacit Coexistence	Guerrilla Disorder

However, rather than viewing wartime political orders as merely competitive, other studies have argued that the constraints rebels and states face sometimes cause collaboration.⁸ Most prominently, Staniland theorised that, much like regular state-formation, states and rebels can make political deals and coalitions.⁹ He created a typology for wartime political orders, describing six possible types of rebel-state collaboration (figure 1), but purposefully did not address *why* rebels and state collaborate.¹⁰ Other authors have highlighted how rebel-state collaboration can benefit the state. For

instance, Mukhopadhyay argued that incorporating warlords into the state structure of Afghanistan contributed to effective governance.¹¹ South advanced a similar argument regarding Myanmar, where insurgents agreed to ceasefires and in return were allowed to continue their civilian administrations.¹²

The literature has repeatedly discussed relationships between states and rebels that we would consider rebel-state collaboration, but few have clearly defined it. For the purposes of this article, we discuss rebel-state collaboration as follows: *a sustained and negotiated relationship between a state and a rebel group, in which their behaviour indicates that both parties acknowledge that considering the other's interests is mutually beneficial*. This collaboration may vary from informal agreements that aim to manage the conflict to some extent, to the close coordination across a wide range of activities. That rebel-state collaboration exists on a continuum and can take many forms is already recognised: Staniland differentiates between active and passive cooperation, Stel conceptualises mediated stateness as a continuum and Worrall states that 'order' in war is 'constantly being negotiated and renegotiated.'¹³ Rebel-state collaboration differs from 'coercion' and 'co-optation', as these tend to emphasise the greater agency of one side in incentivising the other through force and/or persuasion.¹⁴ In contrast, collaboration emphasises the agency of both parties to choose to work together (or not) in a given context. We also differentiate collaboration and cooperation. Cooperation, we argue, can be a one-off event, whereas collaboration must be sustained beyond a single event for a more prolonged period.

Rebel-state collaboration has military and non-military elements, and the distinction between them is rarely clean in insurgency and civil war. From the perspective of war being a continuation of politics by other means, insurgency/rebellion are a form of 'armed politics', where decisions to employ instruments of power – military or otherwise - are fundamentally political.¹⁵ Any actions, military or non-military, can shape the outcome by affecting the legitimacy of rebels and states in conflict.

A decision to collaborate is also typically a decision not to attack one's opponent. As we will show with education collaboration between the Taliban and the Afghan state, the decision to collaborate in service provision is often also a decision *not* to attack the very same services, and to focus military resources elsewhere. For that reason, while we acknowledge that lines of effort might be separated into military and non-military action, we do not assume *a priori* that separate motives and mechanisms necessarily underpin these forms of collaboration.

The rebel governance literature provides clear examples of rebel-state collaboration. However, research focuses primarily on the governance itself, without explaining collaboration comprehensively.

Stel analysed the dynamic relationship between the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) and the Lebanese State. They showed how the PLO assuming responsibility in predominantly Palestinian areas benefited the state, since it regarded these as burdensome.¹⁶ A second case is the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE). Mampilly, and Terpstra and Frerks, have shown how they interacted with state governance structures in various ways – mimicking state service provision in some spheres of activity while co-opting state services in others.¹⁷ In turn, the Sri Lankan state continued to staff and fund these, illustrating that rebel governance is more complex than a simple rebel-state binary.¹⁸ Collaboration arose partly because both parties wanted to provide governance to maintain legitimacy: the LTTE to meet civilian demands and the state to appear credible towards international donors and the Tamil population.¹⁹ ~~Sometimes they sought this legitimacy through ‘mimicking’ the state with their own parallel activities. In other spheres they actively collab.~~ But while acknowledging these practices, ~~the literature~~ they stops short of providing a comprehensive explanation for rebel-state collaboration that could facilitate comparison across contexts.

Research Design & Methodology

Given the lack of detailed accounts of why rebel-state collaboration occurs, our approach is to analyse specific conflicts in depth to find mechanisms that explain collaboration. Identifying these inductively, the aim is that these can inform future comparative research and theory building. We are therefore interested in mechanisms that might be present across different cases. However, given the complex nature of wartime political orders and the practical difficulties studying them, we stop short of claiming that a general covering law could be established to explain all instances of rebel-state collaboration.²⁰ Rather, we are looking for mechanisms that combine to explain rebel-state collaboration across different insurgencies and civil wars, based on the available evidence.²¹

Following this logic, we adopt a 'heuristic' case study approach, which 'inductively identifies new variables, hypotheses, causal mechanisms and causal paths.'²² Heuristic case studies are particularly useful for cases that are not explained by an existing theory;²³ heuristic literally translates to 'serving to find out'.²⁴

Case studies not only enable the identification of new hypotheses and variables; they allow us to consider the distinct political and cultural contexts that potentially influence rebel-state collaboration. We achieved this through process tracing: 'a research method for tracing causal mechanisms using detailed, within-case empirical analysis of how a causal process plays out in an actual case.'²⁵ We began by identifying the initial moment when rebel-state collaboration occurred and then tracked the relationship as it developed. Importantly, we assumed that both the rebels and government act rationally, in the sense that they make a calculated decision to collaborate when it furthers their individual interests.

The cases were selected based on three criteria. First, there had to be significant empirical evidence of rebel-state collaboration. Second, the collaboration had to be sustained for a significant time, at least over several months, so that developments could be tracked. Third, the rebel group must have established developed forms of rebel governance within their territory. When cases fit these criteria, we could classify them as 'crucial cases', as they fit the research's central puzzle: why collaborate with the state on services that serve the purpose of competing?²⁶ Based on these criteria, the Taliban (Afghanistan) between 2001 and 2011 and the PYD (Syria) between 2011 and 2015 were selected as case studies. There are multiple reports of sustained collaboration between the government and the Taliban in Afghanistan, particularly regarding education.²⁷ In Syria the PYD has engaged in a favourable relationship with the Syrian Assad regime that has allowed the establishment of its own administration.

The case studies employed a range of sources. Primary sources included rebel or state press' releases and circulated night letters. Secondary sources included academic literature, local news articles and reports from NGOs and think-tanks. Fieldwork may have enabled us to corroborate our findings even more strongly, though this was not possible for practical reasons.

Before proceeding, we acknowledge that neither 'rebels' nor 'the government' are monolithic entities. As our analysis will show, collaboration may be between local commanders and village elders, regional bureaucrats or international leaders. Our interest is not with a specific type of actor within government or rebel groups. Rather, it is the underlying motives and explanations for collaboration that interest us, at whatever level the decision making takes place. As far as the evidence allows, we are as specific as possible about which actors we are referring to as we go, even if we sometimes refer generally to 'the government', or the relevant rebel group to describe central decision-making.

Case Study 1: Afghanistan

The Afghan insurgency is the ideal case to study rebel-state collaboration because of the conflict's decentralised and fluid governance dynamics. The central Afghan state has always relied on local actors to govern. The Western-influenced, contemporary Afghan government clashes fiercely with the traditional and Islamist Taliban, yet the two have collaborated extensively. We focus on their engagement in education, characterised by initial competition but later collaboration. The Taliban initially targeted schools with military attacks, then later shifted policy to collaborate with the Ministry of Education (MoE) to provide education in Taliban controlled or influenced areas. This makes it an ideal case to examine what caused the shift. Our period of examination runs from 2001 to 2011 for two reasons. First, the shift from competition to collaboration is most clearly shown in- this period. Second, the initial shift from competition to collaboration is most richly documented, making the process tracing more accurate and detailed.

2001 – 2007: Targeting Education

After the fall of the Taliban regime, the new Afghan government and international donor community devoted extensive resources towards rebuilding the public education sector.²⁸ The initial success of state schools was quickly met with harsh Taliban opposition, however. The Taliban targeted state-run schools for several reasons. Enforcing strict Sharia- based, male only education, they rejected secular education on religious and ideological grounds. Many Taliban commanders had been taught in private

madrassas [religious schools] themselves and acted out of ideological and religious motivations. They disproportionately targeted secular and girls' schools compared to state *madrassas*, NGO-based or private schools.²⁹ Warning schools with threatening night letters, they followed up by killing numerous teachers and burnt some schools to the ground.³⁰ Beyond religious grounds, the Taliban leadership was frustrated by the educational improvements as they symbolised the government's authority and capability and thus enhanced the latter's legitimacy.³¹ Targeting schools thus had a strategic and ideological function.

2007 – 2010: Local Negotiations

Around 2007, school attacks ceased in certain areas. Local Taliban commanders started to negotiate with local elders and school leaders to halt the violence in return for increased religious curriculum content and religious teaching staff. Many schools saw complying with the Taliban as a necessary evil, given the lack of state military power in these areas. Despite these changes, the central Afghan government kept funding state-run schools, accepting Taliban influence. Asif Nang, a spokesperson for the MoE, openly admitted they negotiated with the rebels to reopen schools: 'If they want to call schools '*madrassa*' we will accept that, if they want to say *Mullah* [Islamic teacher or leader] to a teacher we have no problem with that. Whatever objections they [the Taliban] may have we are ready to talk to them.'³²

How and why local Taliban and MoE collaborated is well-illustrated by events in Andar district, Ghazni province.³³ The rebels had fiercely targeted state-run schools since 2002. After 2006, the Taliban formed a local education commission that negotiated with village elders and MoE officials to address local grievances.³⁴ In 2008, schools were allowed to reopen, providing the curriculum was modified to better fit Islamic prescriptions and pro-Taliban staff were hired.³⁵

Collaboration between the state and the Taliban was inconsistent, however: attacks on state schools tripled in 2008, suggesting cooperation was not the norm. The Taliban ceasing school attacks also seems counterintuitive given their growing strength since 2006. Nevertheless, the developments demonstrate that both sides preferred collaboration over competition in some areas, even if it increased the other's legitimacy. Two main reasons appear to explain this.

First, local Taliban cells changed their attitude towards state-run schools to appease local populations. Resistance to the Taliban had risen as they grew stronger, since they entered more progressive areas and their fighters often acted harshly towards local populations.³⁶ Moreover, the targeting of schools was controversial amongst Afghans as the events in Andar district demonstrate.³⁷ Various policy

changes indicate there was increasing awareness amongst the Taliban that their education stances were negatively affecting their popular support, hence the establishment of the Quetta education committee, the (re)opening of schools, and the supplying of religious private schools with pens and textbooks.³⁸

Second, compromising with the Taliban was unavoidable for the MoE to prevent a complete loss of control over some state-run schools. The MoE was still under pressure from NGOs, foreign states and the population to improve education delivery, suggesting that the perceptions of international audiences were relevant to their decision to approve local negotiations.³⁹ Although Afghans condemned Taliban actions, they were also frustrated by the government's inability to protect them. The MoE thus decided it would rather modify state-run schools than close them, departing from secular, international standards to reflect local realities.⁴⁰ For instance, the Ministry designed community-based education for unstable areas by modifying the curriculum and recruited religious teachers.

The Taliban and the MoE only collaborated in areas where both parties held a relatively equal footing. Where one side held a significant edge, schools would be run solely by the dominant party. In contested areas, both parties favoured collaboration over competition as they were simply unable to beat the other without getting involved in a costly and sustained military engagement. The government had limited presence in the South and East which prevented it from providing the necessary security to protect schools, even with the help of foreign forces. The Taliban also lacked the numbers and popular support to establish full control. In these areas, collaboration was therefore less costly than competition.

Despite the seal of approval from both leaderships, negotiation success still depended heavily on the local character of the Taliban cells, MoE representatives and village elders. Taliban cells differed significantly in their stance on education. Factions in Wardak and Badghis, located outside traditional Taliban areas, adopted a lenient stance towards education, whereas fighters in Taliban's heartland Kandahar were much more restrictive.⁴¹ Similarly, given that the MoE relied on local elites to provide education in many areas, the composition of these local elites influenced negotiation success.⁴² One study showed that elites in Wardak had secured more concessions from the Taliban than elites in Badghis, for two reasons.⁴³ First, there was more pressure from civilians in Wardak that necessitated action. Second, Wardak elites acted more as a bloc, improving their negotiating power.

In conclusion, [the initial](#) rebel-state collaboration in Afghanistan can be explained by two main factors. First, local agents of both parties recognised the need to retain and/or gain popular legitimacy and believed the best strategy would be collaboration. Second, both parties were not in a position to defeat

the other and preferred collaboration to a costly conflict without significant gains. Military and non-military considerations, in combination, shaped the political decision to collaborate.

2010: Local Deals Go Mainstream

Similar causal dynamics were present after 2010, although a level of national coordination emerged. A significant decline in attacks on state schools preceded a new round of negotiations between the MoE and the Taliban leadership on the re-opening of state-run schools. An agreement was allegedly reached in 2011 which, similar to the local deals, facilitated more Taliban control over staff and curriculum.⁴⁴ The details of rebel-state collaboration were still negotiated locally, albeit within the nationally provided framework. The new deal was impactful: by spring 2011, there were virtually no reported attacks. By 2012 more than 600 schools had re-opened.⁴⁵

Increased collaboration on education reflected the Taliban's growing desire to gain legitimacy, and the government's increasing recognition of its inability to control local government comprehensively. The successful negotiations in 2011 contrasted with failure in 2007, when the MoE left the negotiation early on because the US government vetoed its involvement.⁴⁶ Around 2011, the situation had drastically changed for the MoE, complicated by the conflict's escalation. Additionally, Barack Obama's election rejuvenated calls for a political solution, and various political channels opened up with the Taliban.⁴⁷ Education talks were meant to build trust between the Taliban and the Afghan government on a path to a broader political settlement.⁴⁸ As explained by education minister Wardak, 'I hope, *Inshallah*, soon there will be a peaceful negotiation, a meaningful negotiation with our own opposition and that will not compromise at all the (...) balanced education to our people.'⁴⁹ Both recognition that collaboration had worked locally in some situations, and international pressure, thus contributed to broader collaboration.

While the MoE's priority was its relationship with the Taliban, the rebels' priority was popular legitimacy. Their increased efforts to influence state-run schools reflected a broader strategic shift towards focusing on governance. The Taliban aimed to delegitimise the Afghan government and present itself as the credible alternative. Having previously aimed to expose the government's limitations by targeting state-run schools, the local deals had gradually convinced larger parts of the Taliban that providing education themselves was a better tactic to obtain popular support.⁵⁰

The Taliban's desire to govern stems from the realisation that they could never militarily beat the ISAF-backed Afghan government.⁵¹ Consistent with classical insurgency theorists such as Mao, the Taliban realised the Afghan population was the key to victory.⁵² Significantly, the Taliban is not necessarily preoccupied with controlling territory, but with controlling people.⁵³ Their rhetoric reflects this. As one

commander stated: 'The Taleban are the children of the people (...) The Taleban have always tried to be close to their people and to get their support.'⁵⁴ The collaboration with the MoE perfectly captures this strategy. Although the Taliban did not own the building or pay the teachers, they did control what happened in schools. Moreover, the Taliban faced financial constraints.⁵⁵ By collaborating with the government through co-opting their services, the Taliban achieved their primary objectives at the cost of accepting that the government would enhance its legitimacy by appearing to run a secure and ordered education system. At a local level, rebels calculated that the benefits would outweigh the costs, and this realisation steadily came to shape national policy.

Conclusion

The initial Taliban attacks on state-run schools can be explained by existing arguments: rebels targeted the state's governance to damage its legitimacy and popular support. Remarkably, however, rebel-state collaboration gradually emerged. The Taliban ceased their attacks, whilst the MoE allowed the rebels to influence the management of state-run schools. How can this be explained?

First, it is important to recognise that both parties compromised on their own ideal version of education. The Taliban lacked the capabilities and resources to establish a functional education system in all areas they held a foothold. Similarly, the MoE did not have the military control over various areas to guarantee a safe school environment. Second, both parties were heavily influenced by civilian demands. Initially, the Taliban appeared to underestimate the unpopularity of school attacks, causing local cells to broker deals to try and gain greater popular support. Conversely, MoE officials recognised it could not adequately secure their schools and needed to compromise to protect its citizens.

These local deals were embedded in their local context, negotiated by local agents, illustrating that rebel-state collaboration is not exclusively an elite-driven process. The leaderships of both parties followed their example and around 2010 started negotiating a nationwide deal. Violence was nearly eradicated and many state-run schools re-opened. The national deal demonstrates the importance of international legitimacy to explain collaboration, given the MoE was pressured by the Obama administration to use the deal to open political channels with the rebels to solve the conflict.

Case Study 2: Syria

The disintegration of the Syrian Assad regime (hereafter: the regime) in the Syrian conflict allowed the establishment of the *de facto* autonomous Kurdish region Rojava: a governance project led by the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) and its military wing the People's Defense Unit (YPG). Despite a traditionally difficult relationship with the regime, the majority-Kurdish areas⁵⁶ have been relatively free from regime attacks during the conflict.⁵⁷ The relative peace in the north-eastern areas mainly resulted from a non-aggression pact between the regime and the PYD. Despite being enemies, they found themselves in a 'marriage of convenience'.⁵⁸ This section assesses the nature of their collaboration and explores the rationale of both parties.

Overview

The PYD was formed in 2003 by supporters of the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK).⁵⁹ Although the precise relationship between the PYD and the PKK remains debated, the former is clearly an ideological offshoot of the latter and significantly benefits from the PKK's resources, organisational strength and experience.⁶⁰ The PYD distinguished itself from other Syrian Kurdish political parties by adopting a platform of left-wing Kurdish nationalism.⁶¹ Despite their relatively weak presence at the start of the Syrian conflict in 2011, the PYD quickly became the most powerful Kurdish political party. Their rise to power was boosted by an unexpected supporter: the regime. Both recognised their mutual interest in a powerful PYD.⁶² The regime hoped the Kurds could bring regional stability, whilst the PYD hoped to benefit from the regime's seal of approval to compete with its main Kurdish political rival, the Kurdish National Council (KNC).⁶³ To strengthen the PYD, the regime tolerated the return of prominent PYD figures to Syria and agreed to release PYD members from prison in October 2011.⁶⁴ In return, the PYD adopted a pragmatic and ambiguous stance towards the regime, claiming neither opposition nor support. Furthermore, the PYD quelled anti-regime protests; supposedly to maintain order but evidently to the regime's benefit.⁶⁵

Whereas both the regime and PYD would have preferred only temporary collaboration, the conflict's development ensured their mutual dependency. After a bomb attack killed four high-ranking officials in Damascus, Assad feared the Syrian army was too stretched to respond to the armed opposition.⁶⁶ The regime strategically withdrew most of its troops from the majority-Kurdish regions to concentrate on the 'Damascus–Homs–Aleppo corridor'.⁶⁷ It only maintained operational bases in the two main urban centres, Hasakah and Qamishli.⁶⁸

The withdrawal allowed the PYD to consolidate its position and build its own administration: the Rojava. Although some skirmishes occurred, the take-over was remarkably smooth overall.⁶⁹ The PYD's ascent was aided by the regime leaving weapons and ammunition behind for the YPG, leaving prominent analysts to conclude that coordination had occurred.⁷⁰ In subsequent years, the regime and PYD continued collaborating on multiple fronts. Multiple clashes illustrated that this 'marriage of convenience' was not always amicable, but clashes were never serious enough to cause a definitive rift.

Live and let live

Whilst the PYD and the regime were uneasy partners, both realised that intense military engagement was counterproductive considering the wider political context. The regime found itself facing a powerful armed opposition, whereas the PYD was more focused on defeating the other Kurdish political parties. An informal non-aggression pact ensured the YPG and regime forces only clashed locally and sporadically, allowing them to focus elsewhere.⁷¹

A powerful PYD benefits both

The regime tried to prevent military conflict with the Kurds ever since the Syrian conflict began. Fearing the supposedly superb organisation of the Kurds, concessions made in early 2011 signified the regime's preference for stability to contain the rebellion.⁷² The Syrian leadership feared the fragmented and volatile Kurdish political opposition and favoured a powerful, but manageable, Kurdish political party.⁷³

Although Assad approached various political and cultural factions within the Kurdish community, it was the PYD that eventually secured Assad's approval.⁷⁴ The PYD did so by never outright opposing the regime. Asya Abdullah, PYD co-president, asserted that the PYD offered a 'third line' in the conflict: 'an independent and open track, which does not support either the regime or the opposition.'⁷⁵ Contrastingly, the PYD's biggest political rival, the KNC, worked with the broader armed opposition and thus distanced itself from the regime.⁷⁶

A strong PYD would maintain order in the majority-Kurdish areas without requiring much regime effort. Ba'ath party documents leaked to Al-Jazeera revealed the regime decided to aid the PYD's rise to power.⁷⁷ One document stated there was a need '[t]o place Kurdish areas under surveillance; and to coordinate with the [PYD] in secret to quell protests and protestors; and not to intervene [directly] with security forces in the Kurdish areas.'⁷⁸ In addition to releasing prominent PYD-members from prison, the Syrian government assassinated key political opponents of the PYD.⁷⁹ Importantly, the

regime believed that the PYD could easily be halted when necessary. A Syrian government official explained that 'The Kurds go off track every once in a while, before sooner or later requiring our support, at which point they are often ready to give Damascus what it has been waiting for'.⁸⁰

Whereas the regime collaborated with the PYD to minimise damage ~~to itself~~, the PYD collaborated to maximise their gains. When the regime was weak and preoccupied, the KNC and the PYD saw an opportunity to expand their influence.⁸¹ Amidst the chaos, PYD realised that its initial objectives did not require fighting the regime. Its rise to power was arguably most endangered not by the regime, but by the KNC and other armed rebel groups. At the start of the Syrian conflict, it had a marginal presence compared to the KNC.⁸² Its relationship with the regime and its superior organisational ability and military strength compared to its Kurdish rivals allowed the party to quickly expand their influence.⁸³

My enemy's enemy is my friend

As the conflict escalated, collaboration between the PYD and the Syrian government strengthened. Not only did they tolerate each other; they increasingly saw each other as useful allies when fighting more important enemies. Both continued to operate in a fragmented and dynamic landscape. They both struggled with the rise of extremist Islamist rebels such as Islamic State (IS) and Al-Qaeda affiliate Al-Nusra, after the slow disintegration of the Free Syrian Army. When their interests aligned, therefore, the PYD and the regime collaborated.

Nevertheless, the YPG and the Syrian military also clashed after July 2012. There are many reports of light skirmishes as well as heavier fighting, often in Qamishli or Hasakah.⁸⁴ It indicates that the two only collaborate when it suits both their interests and when not engaged in a systematic alliance. Furthermore, it speaks to the localised aspect of their collaboration: although there was elite desire for collaboration amongst both parties, there was often local competition.

Coordinating efforts

Military collaboration between the regime and the PYD was important for both in their fight against other armed rebel groups. For the Syrian military, PYD assistance was crucial to retake cities such as Aleppo and Hasakah, particularly when the Syrian government did not yet receive extensive support from Russia.⁸⁵ The PYD often resorted to military cooperation with the Syrian military when the YPG became overstretched following major IS offenses.⁸⁶

Collaboration took various forms. The regime often supplied the YPG with weapons and ammunition to better support its fights with mutual enemies; for instance in Ras al-Ayn, where the YPG ousted Al-Nusra from the city.⁸⁷ One local who fought in the battle stated: 'The YPG then received up to twelve DShk [heavy machine guns] and tanks from the regime. Without them I am not sure we could have won the battle.'⁸⁸

The Syrian military and the YPG have also coordinated ground operations when their interests aligned, fighting alongside each other to recapture Hasakah in 2015.⁸⁹ Later reports mention similar dynamics in Aleppo, where Twitter photos show YPG and regime forces together occupying buildings in the aftermath of the battle.⁹⁰ British foreign minister Hammond reinforced these reports claiming that 'what we have seen over the past weeks is very disturbing evidence of co-ordination between Syrian Kurdish forces, the Syrian regime, and the Russian Air Force.'⁹¹

Best Worst Option

Empowering the PYD fitted Assad's wider divide-and-rule strategy.⁹² Given the multitude of enemies, Assad sought to divide the opposition, hoping cannibalisation would ease his fight. The PYD was a perfect enemy to bolster given both other Kurdish factions and the broader opposition disliked the [PYDparty](#), albeit for different reasons. A more powerful PYD would deepen sectarian divides, and the regime thus successfully created competition amongst the opposition.⁹³ Importantly, it would also secure much of the Turkish border, an important security threat given Ankara's support to various rebel forces, and increase leverage over Turkey.⁹⁴

The PYD had little choice but to seek collaboration with the Syrian military. IS forces quickly captured much of PYD-controlled areas and threatened the heart of the majority-Kurdish areas in September 2014.⁹⁵ The PYD brokered strategic alliances with other, sometimes opposing, factions, which indicates it approached potential partnerships pragmatically rather than ideologically.⁹⁶ Idris Nassan, co-head of the Kobani foreign relations department, stated: 'Anyone who is ready to work for democracy (...) we are ready to coordinate with them (...) with the opposition, but also with the regime.'⁹⁷ Addressing the relation with the regime forces, co-leader Salih Muslim explained the fight against IS was most important: 'Salafists attack Kurds; they also oppose the regime and Shiites in general. We [the PYD and regime] both are fighting against them, albeit for different reasons.'⁹⁸

Protecting the majority-Kurdish areas was not only necessary to survive; it was also crucial in the PYD's quest for legitimacy. Protecting the Kurds portrayed the party as the legitimate and capable governor.⁹⁹ Even many Kurdish activists who protested against the authoritarian Syrian government

acclaimed the PYD's military efforts: 'I was the most critical person against the PYD. But at the moment, I have to admit that they are saving the people from the worst.'¹⁰⁰ Regarding the support for the PYD, it is striking that areas further away from security threats were less supportive of PYD rule.¹⁰¹

Governing for Legitimacy

Another important causal explanation of Assad and the PYD's collaboration was their reliance on each other to deliver effective governance in majority-Kurdish areas. After July 2012, a remarkable dual presence arose, in which the PYD and the Syrian government both coordinated and clashed over service provision. The regime allowed the PYD to take over many services abandoned by regime officials, such as garbage collection and electricity.¹⁰² The Syrian government continued to protect its institutions where possible however, issuing official documents and paying the salaries of hospital staff and teachers.¹⁰³ The PYD in turn sought to replace regime institutions as much as it could to position itself as the dominant governing force.¹⁰⁴ Nevertheless, collaboration with the Syrian government remained crucial to run a relatively smooth administration and satisfy civilian demands. Particularly in urban centres where the regime maintained a military presence, the PYD and Syrian government bureaucrats sometimes even worked in the same buildings.¹⁰⁵ To deliver services, a Qamishli business man noted that 'while both plan together, the regime pays... and the PYD implements.'¹⁰⁶

Why does the regime continue to provide governance despite it aiding the PYD's administration? The answer is twofold. First, discontinuing service provision completely would result in a far bigger legitimacy loss for Assad than continuing service provision that benefitted the PYD too. For the state, maintaining its governance structures was symbolically important in signalling that it could still provide for its people.¹⁰⁷

Second, maintaining some essential governance structures in the majority-Kurdish areas gave the regime an edge in their relationship with the PYD.¹⁰⁸ By not allowing the PYD to take over fully, the Kurdish people remained reliant on the regime in many ways: if they wanted to travel, they needed a Syrian passport; to receive an internationally recognised diploma, they needed to visit a state school or university. Since the Kurds remained reliant on these services, the PYD remained reliant on the regime too.

The PYD had to collaborate with the regime to build local legitimacy, which was heavily tied to effective governance in the majority-Kurdish areas. As stated, various essential services remained in Syrian government control. The PYD therefore created dual structures, such as its own construction permits and university, to position itself as the dominant governing force.¹⁰⁹ These often failed, however. For

instance, the university lacked an accredited status, and consequently experienced low attendance numbers in 2016.¹¹⁰ The PYD therefore failed to break away from the regime and remained reliant on its services.

A smooth running of the majority-Kurdish areas was even more important considering that the PYD was often criticised for its authoritarian rule by the KNC and activists ~~that targeted the PYD's authoritarian rule~~.¹¹¹ Additionally, the failure to win over many tribal leaders meant the PYD was always under pressure from internal factions.¹¹² The PYD therefore wanted to profile themselves as the only legitimate and capable governor of Rojava. Providing functional governance was the PYD's answer. It is no coincidence that many local administrative and governmental structures were set up in late 2013. ~~This was when t~~Around this time, the KNC ~~won~~ boosted its international legitimacy withas its attendeattendance at the prestigious Geneva Talks to represent Syria's Kurds.¹¹³ Evidently, the PYD's governance had been crucial in improving its image. Although criticism remained, many Kurds expressed their support for the governing capabilities of the PYD. As one activist explained: '[the PYD] are very hard-working, you know if they take on a task, unlike the KNC people, they do it efficiently. Water can be turned into gold in their hands!'¹¹⁴

Political Economy – a Marriage of Necessity

The PYD and the Assad regime continued to rely on each other for the provision of important goods and resources. Despite radical political transformation, in many ways the majority-Kurdish areas were still locked in a political economy with the regime.¹¹⁵ Importantly, the effective loss of the northeast in 2012 was an economic blow for the Syrian government. The area contains much of Syria's oil and water supply, as well as many agricultural products, most prominently wheat.¹¹⁶ The rest of Syria had always relied on Rojava's raw material and products. The Assad regime had created structures of economic dependency to offset the possibility that these resources could fuel Kurdish secessionism.¹¹⁷ These structures continued to exist in the war economy. For instance, no local agricultural enterprises were allowed; all were state-run.¹¹⁸ All oil refineries were located in the West.

Oil, wheat and hard currency present in the majority-Kurdish areas became particularly valuable in the regime's war economy. The PYD was similarly dependent on the regime, lacking goods such as medicine, which the regime flew into Qamishli airport.¹¹⁹ Moreover, the PYD was reliant on the regime to buy much of its oil and goods. Providing governance in a conflict zone is costly and the PYD wanted to generate more revenue to strengthen its service provision.¹²⁰ In 2014, it spent roughly US\$ 7.7 million, whilst it raised US\$ 16 million.¹²¹ Most of the PYD's revenue was generated through oil and agriculture and the regime was the main importer for both commodities.¹²² Its dependency increased

when the Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraq, a KNC ally, closed the Syrian border to pressure the PYD into opening up its institutions to rival Kurdish factions.¹²³

The oil production perfectly illustrates the mutual dependency of the regime and the PYD. In 2014, the YPG gained control over the Rumeilan oil fields.¹²⁴ Curiously, these oil fields were once again given up by the regime without a shot being fired.¹²⁵ As mentioned before, the Kurds did not possess a refinery and even lacked a pipeline to transport the oil. The common procedure was that oil was extracted from the field controlled by the PYD, which involved regime officials possessing the necessary knowledge and experience. Then the oil was transported to regime refineries in regime-controlled areas by tankers driven by locals.¹²⁶ Given the importance of oil revenue for both parties, Syrian government ministers, including the oil minister, routinely held top-level meetings with the PYD to coordinate their efforts.¹²⁷

Conclusion

Although the PYD and the Assad regime ultimately remain enemies, they found each other in a marriage of convenience. Navigating the splintered Syrian conflict, both parties recognised they could use each other to their own benefit. Despite their collaboration on multiple fronts, however, their inherently incompatible long-term goals continued to generate tension.

Collaboration with the PYD was more intense and sustained than Assad initially expected. Nevertheless, his choice to collaborate is relatively easily explained. The Kurds were the best-worst option in an escalating conflict, over which Assad progressively lost control. Given the circumstances, the PYD was the most reliable and manageable partner. Moreover, without devoting many resources, the regime benefited economically, politically and militarily.

Conversely, collaborating with the regime allowed the PYD to assume control over the majority-Kurdish areas. Nevertheless, the sustained collaboration with the regime should arguably not only be characterised as a marriage of convenience, but also as a marriage of necessity. It was difficult if not impossible to govern Rojava without collaborating with the regime. The PYD was caught in a political economy with pre-existing structures that were hard to break away from. Moreover, facing both external and internal threats, the regime was the most logical partner for the PYD, despite their inherent differences.

Discussion

Main Findings

This study started with the observation that whilst it is obvious rebels and states occasionally collaborate when it suits their political interests, we currently lack a comprehensive understanding of what drives collaboration. We have identified four distinct explanatory mechanisms (Figure 2). Although these are based on the rebel-state collaboration in Syria and Afghanistan, we anticipate that they would contribute to explaining rebel-state collaboration in other cases. With these mechanisms, we demonstrate that both states and rebels do not avoid collaboration with the enemy out of an inherent animosity. Rather, they make calculations about whether collaboration is beneficial or not.

<u>Mechanism</u>	<u>Explanation</u>
Military Stalemate	Rebels and states collaborate when both recognise that they cannot or are unwilling to provide adequate security in a given area.
Legitimacy	Rebels and states collaborate to gain or maintain popular legitimacy.
External threats	Rebels and states collaborate because they deem other enemies as worse and a mutual alliance benefits both.
Political economy	Rebels and states collaborate because both have to operate under the restraints of pre-existing political economy structures

Figure 2: Explaining Rebel-State Collaboration

MILITARY STALEMATE

Rebels and states collaborate when both recognise that they cannot or are unwilling to beat the other militarily in a specific area. This results in a military stalemate, where both fail to establish a position of military dominance to provide adequate security. These situations are often costly, both in terms of human and military resources, without any side securing many gains. The state and rebels thus opt to tolerate each other; conceding the other party continues to have influence over the area, to prevent having to bear heavy costs for minimal returns. This situation is what Staniland would term 'passive cooperation'; a form of tacit coexistence that arises more out of a desire to contain the conflict and minimise cost than out of a shared feeling that collaboration would lead to additional gains. The acknowledgement of both parties that containing the conflict is profitable for them both appears to be the first step towards active collaboration.

This mechanism is clearly visible in both Afghanistan and Syria. In the former case, the Afghan government and Taliban almost exclusively collaborated in areas contested by both. It is in these areas that remarkable agreements arose, with the Afghan military manning checkpoints until 4 p.m., after which the Taliban took over until the following morning.¹²⁸ Similarly, it was only in these contested

areas that state education combined elements of state-run and Taliban-run schools. A military stalemate can also arise out of lack of interest, not ability, to defeat the other. In Syria, the regime and PYD quickly realised that intense military competition would divert resources from more important areas. Although occasional skirmishes indicate their collaboration was far from smooth, their efforts to contain military engagement allowed them both to maximise their gains against other enemies.

LEGITIMACY

Rebels and states collaborate to gain or maintain legitimacy amongst relevant audiences. First, collaboration may improve their relationship with the population of a given area, enhancing their legitimacy. Second, rebels and states can collaborate to enhance their international legitimacy, if for example collaboration allows them to demonstrate good governance.¹²⁹ Crucially however, both parties must accept that collaboration will grant the opponent greater legitimacy too, yet they choose to collaborate anyway. Two reasons explain this. First, both believe they gain more legitimacy than the other party, and therefore achieve *relative* gains from collaborating. Alternatively, not collaborating could cause such significant losses in legitimacy that failing to do so would be worse than allowing the opponent to benefit too.

In both Syria and Afghanistan, the state opted to collaborate with the rebels to ensure a continuing link with (part of) its population and maintain its image as a functioning state to international audiences.¹³⁰ In Afghanistan, the government simultaneously bolstered Taliban legitimacy and its own by collaborating in providing education. The government calculated that the legitimacy gain from maintaining order was greater than the loss of legitimacy from being seen incapable of securing schoolchildren. In Syria, the government decided that enhancing PYD legitimacy was preferable to risking being ousted from the area altogether. Ensuring its presence in the northeast allowed the regime to remind the population constantly that it remained irreplaceable for certain services.

Rebels in both conflicts collaborated because providing governance is essential to legitimacy. The problem for rebels is that they often rely (partly) on the incumbent regime to provide governance, since they themselves lack the necessary resources and expertise to meet civilian demands. In Afghanistan, the Taliban calculated that allowing the government to gain legitimacy through providing a secure education was preferable to attacking state-run schools. The rebels believed they benefitted more than the government since they could position themselves as a governing party too, whilst comparatively they would lose legitimacy if they continued to attack schools. In Syria, the PYD allowed the Assad regime to issue official documents and schools certificates out of necessity, despite their efforts to establish shadow institutions, out of fear for legitimacy losses if the area was mismanaged.¹³¹ This enabled them to achieve greater recognition international recognition for good governance too,

despite the risk of being associated with an Assad regime widely seen as illegitimate by the international community. Both cases demonstrate that satisfying civilian demands to gain legitimacy trumped ideological motivations and whatever enmity they felt towards their opponents.

EXTERNAL THREATS

Rebels and states collaborate because they deem other enemies as worse and that a mutual alliance benefits both. Although an insurgency mainly concerns primary actors, the rebels and the state, there are more actors involved, like the population, other rebel groups, militias and international actors. Whereas the concept of rebel-state collaboration only directly addresses the relationship between one rebel group and the state, the political landscape in which they operate is of great importance. In Syria this dynamic is especially clear. The regime decided that trusting the PYD with control over the northeast was the best available option, given the rise of the armed opposition that threatened its core territory in the West. For the PYD, it was mainly the threats from other opposition groups, most prominently the KNC and IS, that made them collaborate with the regime for security and governance. The importance of the general political context also testifies to the volatile and fluid character of rebel-state collaboration.

POLITICAL ECONOMY

Rebels and states collaborate because both have to operate under the restraints of pre-existing political economy structures. Although conflict tends to tarnish existing political, social and economic ties, many are hard to break away from completely. Even when rebels emerge and assume control over certain territory, regions typically retain ties to the rest of the country. Rebels often actively attempt to cut these ties, but given the complexity of the task, wartime political orders can necessitate collaboration. The war economy in Syria perfectly illustrates this mechanism. When the PYD assumed control over the oil fields in northeast Syria, it could theoretically sell its oil to any buyer. Nevertheless, to extract the oil, it was reliant on the expertise and experience of regime officials who predated on the new structures of the PYD. However reluctantly, the PYD had to accommodate the pre-existing structures. Similarly, the regime would have preferred not to finance the party, but it needed the crude oil.

Conceptualising Rebel-State Collaboration

In addition to the [causal-explanatory](#) mechanisms, the case studies provide several valuable insights to better conceptualise rebel-state collaboration in three areas: agents, time and space. First, it is important to distinguish local and elite agents in studying rebel-state collaboration as both can drive the process. Education negotiations in Afghanistan were initiated by local agents; elite policy shifts followed far later. Crucially, while the motivations of local and elite agents can differ in a given conflict,

we found that the mechanisms that combine to explain collaboration can be found at these different levels. It was in local theatres that Taliban and Afghan government forces recognised they could not defeat each other militarily, and thus negotiation appeared more viable. In Syria this process was centrally recognised and elite-driven, though competition between the government and the PYD still existed at a local level. Investigating the agency of local and elite individuals and groups in navigating decisions about collaboration or competition would be a fruitful area of future research.

Second, the extent of collaboration can differ across time and space. Rebels and states are complex organisations, interacting in a dynamic cultural landscape, further fragmented by war. Motivations to collaborate are embedded in a local context; local rebel cells can sometimes make different decisions about how to engage the state. The Taliban's decentralised structure resulted in local cells adopting different stances on education. Different civilian demands or a different political economy in certain areas might also explain variations in collaboration. When viewed as part of a broader political contest, collaboration in one area does not exclude competition elsewhere. Despite military coordination in various battles, the PYD and the Syrian regime also clashed elsewhere.

It follows, thirdly, that rebel-state collaboration is fluid and constantly evolving. Their initial collaboration is not always part of a grander strategy, but can emerge out of sudden necessity or short-term benefit. The initial local deals in Afghanistan were not brokered in anticipation of top-level negotiations. Motivations to sustain or suspend collaboration can change over time. This is also evident in Syria. The regime initially collaborated with the PYD to prevent further rebellion, but never expected to collaborate for so long. Since the relationship remains a bargaining process between enemies, it is dynamic and fragile. We anticipate that the mechanisms we identify will be found across cases, but their expression and relative importance will vary depending on the context in question.

Conclusion

To conclude, characterising insurgency and civil war as dichotomous competitions between rebels and the state neglects the more nuanced and complex political bargains and relations between them. This article has sought to deepen our understanding of rebel-state collaboration by offering four distinct mechanisms that indicate why these collaborations may take place during civil war. Rebels and states collaborate when both want to prevent a costly military stalemate; to gain or maintain popular legitimacy; because they deem other enemies as worse and that a mutual alliance benefits both, or because both must operate under the structural constraints of the prevailing political economy. Given that in civil war both states and rebels must navigate a complex and dynamic political landscape, (partial) collaboration may seem counterintuitive but can often reward both sides.

These findings have important implications for the wider civil war literature. First, we must rethink how to accurately capture and analyse the relationship between rebels and states. Too often, their relationship is characterised as a dichotomy in which control over a particular territory is viewed as a zero-sum game between the government and the rebels. Contrastingly, we showed that control can be shared by rebels and states, and even benefit both. Although their long-term objectives usually clash - only one can be the sole governing entity of the whole country - this does not prevent short-term interests from aligning. That rebels and state must navigate a complex political landscape with many constraints is too often neglected in explaining rebel and state behaviour. Too heavy a focus on the competition elements potentially disregards the complexity of their relationship. In this respect our research reinforces Mampilly's recommendation that international actors consider the complex local dynamics of civil wars, so that their interventions are not counterproductive.¹³²

It follows, second, that we should question whether the power dynamic captured in the traditional rebel-state dichotomy is fully justified. Normally, one assumes the state is the dominant party that has everything to lose, such as legitimacy and sovereignty, whereas the rebels are the weaker party that has everything to gain. Rebel-state collaboration illustrates, however, that the opposite can also be true. In Afghanistan, the state's legitimacy in certain areas arguably relies more on accommodation from the Taliban than vice versa.

Third, rebel-state collaboration confirms that the distinction between military and non-military elements in civil war is rarely clean. In the case of the Taliban's collaboration on education, for instance, the decision is both military and non-military, since the decision to work with state schools was also a decision not to use military force against them and devote those resources elsewhere. The military/non-military divide may be relevant in practical terms, in shaping the form of collaboration and the lines of effort for rebels and states. However, the causes of collaboration, and the consequences, are political, and will shape the legitimacy of those involved. In that respect, the military/non-military distinction is only partially useful in helping us understand *why* rebels and states collaborate.

Lastly, a common thread in this article is the embeddedness of rebel-state collaboration in a particular time and place. The character of a particular relationship will therefore differ, as will the combinations of reasons explaining collaboration. We anticipate that the mechanisms we identify will be present across different insurgencies. But even in comparing Syria and Afghanistan, one notices that some mechanisms apply to one case more than another. In a given conflict, the relative importance of each varies over time, varies locally, is shaped by the agency of local and elite agents and prevailing political economy structures.

This suggests two paths along which the literature on rebel-state collaboration may develop. The first path is a comparative theoretical approach looking to construct a comprehensive theory of rebel-state collaboration that is then tested them across multiple cases. Ideally this approach would also consider something beyond the scope of this paper: cases where incentives to cooperate exist but actors choose not to do so. The second path is a deeper qualitative approach examining how time, space, structure and agency interact to understand collaboration in a given conflict. We hope that this article has taken an important step in both directions.

Endnotes

- ¹ The dominant Hobbesian conceptualisations of civil war implied that states, powerful and sovereign, maintained stability and created prosperity, whilst rebels brought chaos and destruction. For an excellent critique of these studies, see Péclard and Mechoulan, *Rebel governance*.
- ² Staniland, *States, insurgents*.
- ³ Ibid.
- ⁴ Arjona, *Wartime institutions*; Staniland, *States, insurgents*; Worrall, *(Re-) emergent orders*
- ⁵ Arjona, Kasfir and Mampilly, *Rebel Governance*; Péclard and Mechoulan, *Rebel governance*; Arjona, *Rebelocracy*.
- ⁶ Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence*; Mukhopadhyay *Warlords, Strongman Governors* ; Staniland, *States, insurgents*; Stewart, *Civil war*.
- ⁷ See for instance Martínez and Eng, *Struggling to Perform*; Stewart, *Civil war*.
- ⁸ Christia *Alliance Formation*; Kasfir, Nelson and Terpstra, *Introduction: Armed Groups*.
- ⁹ Staniland, *States, insurgents*.
- ¹⁰ Ibid.
- ¹¹ Mukhopadhyay, *Warlords, Strongman Governors*.
- ¹² South, *Hybrid Governance*.
- ¹³ Staniland, *States, insurgents*; Stel, *Mediated Stateness*; Worrall, *(Re-) emergent orders*, p. 712.
- ¹⁴ See Brenner, 'Ashes of Co-Optation'.
- ¹⁵ Clausewitz, 'On War'; Simpson, *War from the ground up*'
- ¹⁶ Stel, *Mediated Stateness*.
- ¹⁷ Terpstra and Frerks, "Governance Practices".
- ¹⁸ Stokke, *Building the Tamil*.
- ¹⁹ Mampilly *Rebel rulers*; Terpstra and Frerks, *Rebel Governance*.
- ²⁰ For the distinction between 'covering law' and 'mechanism' approaches to causation, see Tilly, *Mechanisms in Political Processes*.
- ²¹ Ibid.
- ²² George and Bennett, *Case Studies*, p. 75.
- ²³ Levy, *Case studies*.
- ²⁴ Eckstein, *Case Study*, p. 137
- ²⁵ Beach, *Process-tracing*.
- ²⁶ Levy, *Case studies*.
- ²⁷ Giustozzi and Franco, *The Battle*; Jackson *Life under*.
- ²⁸ Sigsgaard, *Education and Fragility*.
- ²⁹ Glad, *Knowledge on Fire*.
- ³⁰ Glad, *Knowledge on Fire*; Johnson, *The Taliban*.
- ³¹ Human Rights Watch, *Lessons in Terror*.
- ³² The New Humanitarian, *Taliban forces students*.
- ³³ Muzhary, *One Land*.
- ³⁴ Reuter and Younus, *The Return*.
- ³⁵ Ibid.
- ³⁶ Giustozzi, *Negotiating*.
- ³⁷ Rubin and Rudeforth, *Enhancing Access*.
- ³⁸ Giustozzi, *Hearts, Minds*; Giustozzi and Franco, *The Ongoing Battle*.
- ³⁹ Giustozzi and Franco, *The Battle*.
- ⁴⁰ Ruttig, *Schools on the Frontline*.
- ⁴¹ AREU, *The Political Economy*; Giustozzi and Franco *The Battle*.
- ⁴² AREU, *The Political Economy*.
- ⁴³ Ibid.
- ⁴⁴ Rubin and Rudeforth *Enhancing Access*.
- ⁴⁵ Trofimov, *Emboldened Taliban*.
- ⁴⁶ Giustozzi and Franco *The Battle*.
- ⁴⁷ Ruttig, *Schools on the Frontline*.
- ⁴⁸ Giustozzi and Franco *The Battle*.

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- ⁴⁹ Ruttig, *Schools on the Frontline*, p. 127
- ⁵⁰ Giustozzi, *Negotiating*.
- ⁵¹ Giustozzi, *Hearts, Minds*.
- ⁵² Mao, *On Guerrilla Warfare*; Royall, *Winning Minds*.
- ⁵³ Jackson, *Life under*.
- ⁵⁴ Danishju, *Taliban Try Soft Power*.
- ⁵⁵ Giustozzi, *Afghanistan: Taliban's*.
- ⁵⁶ Although the region is mainly inhabited by Kurds, there are also significant Syriac, Turkmen and Arab minorities.
- ⁵⁷ International Crisis Group (ICG), *Popular protest*.
- ⁵⁸ ICG, *Syria's Kurds*, p. 15.
- ⁵⁹ Caves, *Syrian Kurds*.
- ⁶⁰ For more details, see Allsopp, *Kurdish Political Parties*; Allsopp and van Wilgenburg, *The Kurds*.
- ⁶¹ Allsopp and van Wilgenburg *The Kurds*.
- ⁶² ICG, *Flight of Icarus?*.
- ⁶³ Khaddour, *How Regional Security*, p. 8; ICG, *Flight of Icarus?*, p. 2.
- ⁶⁴ ICG, *Syria's Kurds*.
- ⁶⁵ Ibid.
- ⁶⁶ Jenkins *The Dynamics*.
- ⁶⁷ Allsopp, *Kurdish Political Parties*, p. 296.
- ⁶⁸ Sary, *Kurdish Self-governance*.
- ⁶⁹ Ibid.
- ⁷⁰ Allsopp and Van Wilgenburg *The Kurds*; ICG, *Flight of Icarus*; Khalaf, *Governing Rojava*.
- ⁷¹ Barfi *Ascent of the PYD*, pp. 5-6; Plakoudis, *The Syrian Kurds*, p. 106.
- ⁷² ICG, *Popular protest*.
- ⁷³ Khaddour *How Regional Security*.
- ⁷⁴ Sary *Kurdish Self-governance*, p. 8-9
- ⁷⁵ Ibid.
- ⁷⁶ Ibid.
- ⁷⁷ Al-Jazeera, *Damascus Documents*.
- ⁷⁸ ICG, *Syria's Kurds*, p. 2.
- ⁷⁹ Ibid, p. 8.
- ⁸⁰ Sary *Kurdish Self-governance*, p. 16.
- ⁸¹ ICG, *Flight of Icarus?*.
- ⁸² Ibid.
- ⁸³ Allsopp, *Kurdish Political Parties*.
- ⁸⁴ Plakoudis *The Syrian Kurds*, p. 106.
- ⁸⁵ Balanche, *Kurdish Forces*.
- ⁸⁶ Sary *Kurdish Self-governance*, p. 16.
- ⁸⁷ ICG, *Flight of Icarus?*, p. 8; Allsopp and Van Wilgenburg *The Kurds*, p. 68
- ⁸⁸ ICG, *Flight of Icarus?*, p. 8.
- ⁸⁹ Allsopp and Van Wilgenburg *The Kurds*, p. 69; Al-Jazeera, *Syrian Kurds*; Kurdwatch, *Tall Hamis*.
- ⁹⁰ Andresen, *Friends or Foes?*.
- ⁹¹ House of Commons, *Debate*, column 135.
- ⁹² ICG, *Syria's Kurds*.
- ⁹³ Allsopp, *Kurdish Political Parties*.
- ⁹⁴ Gary *Kurdish Self-governance*.
- ⁹⁵ Plakoudas, *The Syrian Kurds*.
- ⁹⁶ Allsopp and Van Wilgenburg *The Kurds*, p. 67.
- ⁹⁷ Al-Jazeera, *Syrian Kurds*.
- ⁹⁸ ICG, *Flight of Icarus?*, p. 8.
- ⁹⁹ Khalaf *Governing Rojava*.
- ¹⁰⁰ ICG, *Flight of Icarus?*, p. 7.
- ¹⁰¹ Khalaf, *Governing Rojava*, p. 12.
- ¹⁰² Ibid., p. 16

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- ¹⁰³ Sary, *Kurdish Self-governance*, p. 16
- ¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 17.
- ¹⁰⁵ Khalaf, *Governing Rojava*, p. 19.
- ¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁰⁷ ICG, *Flight of Icarus?*.
- ¹⁰⁸ Khalaf, *Governing Rojava*.
- ¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*
- ¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*
- ¹¹¹ *Ibid.*
- ¹¹² Khaddour, *The Assad Regime's*.
- ¹¹³ ICG, *Flight of Icarus?*, p. 15.
- ¹¹⁴ Khalaf, *Governing Rojava*, p. 18.
- ¹¹⁵ Balanche, *Sectarianism in Syria's*, p. 58.
- ¹¹⁶ Khalaf, *Governing Rojava*.
- ¹¹⁷ Balanche, *Rojava Seeks*.
- ¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*
- ¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*
- ¹²⁰ Khalaf, *Governing Rojava*, p. 17.
- ¹²¹ Narbone, Favier and Collombier, *Inside Wars*, p. 18.
- ¹²² Khalaf, *Governing Rojava*, p. 17.
- ¹²³ Khaddour, *How Regional Security*, pp. 16-17.
- ¹²⁴ *Ibid.*
- ¹²⁵ Van Wilgenburg, *Syrian Kurdish*.
- ¹²⁶ Eaton et al. *Conflict Economies*, p. 43.
- ¹²⁷ KurdWatch, *Rumailan*.
- ¹²⁸ Jackson, *Life under*, p. 25.
- ¹²⁹ See Schlichte and Schneckener, *Armed Groups* for an excellent discussion on the importance of legitimacy for armed groups, and how they cope with addressing different audiences.
- ¹³⁰ See Mampilly, *Rebel Rulers* and Terpstra and Frerks, *Rebel Governance* for a similar explanation for collaboration in Sri Lanka.
- ¹³¹ Community demands were also important in Sri Lanka, see Terpstra and Frerks, *Rebel Governance*.
- ¹³² Mampilly, "A Marriage of Inconvenience".

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